

**El Centro Field Office
Imperial Sand Dunes
Proposed Recreation Area Management
Plan/California Desert Conservation Area Plan
Amendment and Final Environmental Impact
Statement
Volume I of II**

El Centro Field Office

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
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Front cover photograph acknowledgement:
Photograph Courtesy of Mr. Kevin Marty

Abstract

The Imperial Sand Dunes Proposed Recreation Area Management Plan, Proposed Amendment to the California Desert Conservation Area Plan (Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) describes and analyzes eight alternatives for managing approximately 214,930 acres of Bureau of Land Management-administered lands within the Imperial Sand Dunes Special Recreation Management Area (ISD SRMA) in Imperial County, California. Information provided by the public, Bureau of Land Management personnel, and other agencies and organizations has been used to develop and analyze the alternatives in the Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS.

The eight alternatives under consideration generally vary by the allowed level of recreational use and extent of preservation of the area's cultural and natural resources. Alternative 1 is the No Action Alternative, which describes the management conditions prescribed in the 1987 RAMP for the Planning Area. Alternative 2 describes the continuation of the present management of the Planning Area. Alternative 3 generally places emphasis on preservation of the Planning Area's natural and cultural resources through limited public use. It proposes fewer motorized and developed recreation opportunities. Alternatives 4 through 6 propose a combination of natural processes and active management techniques for recreation and use management. Management under these alternatives includes decisions that are a balance of multiple uses. Alternative 4 identifies a higher level of preservation and a lower level of motorized use, recreation opportunities, and renewable development than Alternatives 5 and 6. Alternative 5 identifies a moderate level of preservation and a moderate level of motorized use, recreation opportunities, and renewable development than Alternatives 4 and 6. Alternative 6 identifies a lower level of preservation and a higher level of motorized use, recreation opportunities, and renewable development than Alternatives 4 and 5. Alternative 7 generally places an emphasis on consumer-driven uses and the widest array of uses, such as renewable energy, transportation, and utility rights-of-way, and enhanced recreational opportunities (including motorized use). It places a greater emphasis on developed and motorized recreation opportunities and less on remote settings and primitive recreation. Alternative 8 is the Proposed Plan and CDCA Plan Amendment, which provides for management of each resource and resource use and provides for a balance between authorized resource use and the protection and long-term sustainability of sensitive resources. It allows visitation and development within the Planning Area while ensuring that resource protection is not compromised in accordance with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield as mandated by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. The final decisions under the Proposed Plan and CDCA Plan Amendment could be identical to those under one of the other alternatives presented or could be a combination of features from several of the other alternatives. The Preferred Alternative is a combination of Alternatives 7 and 8. Alternative 8 provides

the management of all aspects of the preferred alternative, except for (1) the management of Dunebuggy Flats campground and (2) the part of the management of the microphyll woodlands. The Dunebuggy Flats campground would be managed as analyzed in Alternative 7. It would not be seasonally closed, nor would the Bureau of Land Management-managed land surrounding the campground have a seasonal closure. The microphyll woodlands would be managed under a combination of Alternatives 7 and 8. Wash Road, which provides access to the microphyll woodlands, would be open as far as the current level of use as analyzed under Alternative 7. The area beyond current use (Wash 33 to Wash 70) would be closed as analyzed under Alternative 8.

Major issues addressed in this Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS include management of recreation and public access, special designations, special status species, mineral resources, and lands and realty.

Mission Statement

The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for stewardship of our public lands. The Bureau of Land Management is committed to manage, protect, and improve these lands in a manner to serve the needs of the American people. Management is based upon the principles of multiple use and sustained yield of our nation's resources within a framework of environmental responsibility and scientific technology. These resources include recreation, rangelands, timber, minerals, watershed, fish and wildlife habitat, wilderness, air and scenic quality, as well as scientific and cultural values.

**Imperial Sand Dunes
Proposed Recreation Area Management Plan,
Proposed Amendment to the California Desert
Conservation Area Plan,
and
Final Environmental Impact Statement**

Prepared by
U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
El Centro Field Office
California

September 2012



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State Director



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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In reply refer to:
1610-DP-P
670.36 P

Dear Reader:

Enclosed for your review is the Imperial Sand Dunes Proposed Recreation Area Management Plan/California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) prepared this document in consultation with cooperating agencies, taking into account public comments received during this planning effort. The Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment provides a framework for the future management direction and appropriate use of the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area, located in Imperial County, California. This document includes both land use planning decisions and implementation decisions to guide the BLM's management of the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area.

The proposed decisions for the Planning Area would include adopting the regional standards for rangeland health and closing Peirson's milk-vetch critical habitat to motorized recreation. Proposed decisions would also amend the CDCA Plan through modifications to the following designations: Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs); Visual Resource Management Classes; Special Recreation Management Areas; off-highway vehicle areas as open, limited, or closed; changes to land tenure; identification of avoidance and exclusion areas for rights-of-way; areas open or closed for leasing of fluid minerals and mineral sales; and identification of potential areas for renewable energy, communication sites, and other uses. The above are land use plan decisions and may be protested.

Decisions that are implementation level actions include, but are not limited to, designating routes as open, limited, or closed and increasing limitations on the routes designated as limited; restrictions on camping or parking; site-specific management actions and plans for ACECs, cultural sites, wildlife habitat, or fuels management; and signing, fencing, and other facility management. These implementation level decisions may be appealed.

Public comments and BLM's internal review resulted in a variety of clarifications and modifications throughout the Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS. Revisions made between the Draft RAMP and Draft EIS and the Proposed RAMP/Plan Amendment and FEIS include the following: quantification of some management goals and objectives; additional analysis of impacts to air quality; clarification of multiple-use classes and visual resource management; consideration of lands with wilderness characteristics; modifications to alternatives regarding camping in the Dunebuggy Flats area; and modifications to implementation-level decisions to correctly categorize them as plan-level decisions or implementation actions.

The Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS has been developed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended. This Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment is largely based on Alternative 8, the Preferred Alternative in the Draft RAMP/EIS, which was released on March 26, 2010. The Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS contains the proposed plan decisions, a summary of changes made between the Draft RAMP/Draft EIS and Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS, analysis of the impacts of the decisions, a summary of written comments received during the public review period for the Draft RAMP/Draft EIS, and responses to comments found in Chapter 5, Section 5.4.2, Response to Public Comments.

Pursuant to BLM's planning regulations at 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1610.5-2, any person who participated in the planning process for this Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and has an interest which is or may be adversely affected by the planning decisions may protest approval of the planning decisions in this document within 30 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the Notice of Availability of the Final EIS in the *Federal Register*. For further information on filing a protest, please see the accompanying protest regulations in the pages that follow. The regulations specify the required elements of your protest. Take care to document all relevant facts. As much as possible, reference or cite the planning documents or available planning records (e.g., meeting minutes or summaries, correspondence) that relate to your protest.

E-mailed and faxed protests will not be accepted as valid protests unless the protesting party also provides the original letter by either standard U.S. Postal Service or overnight mail postmarked by the close of the protest period. Under these conditions, the BLM will consider the e-mailed or faxed protest as an advance copy and will afford it full consideration. If you wish to provide the BLM with such advance notification, please direct faxed protests to the attention of Brenda Hudgens-Williams, BLM Protest Coordinator, at 202-245-0028; e-mailed protests may be directed to Brenda_Hudgens-Williams@blm.gov.

All protests, including the follow-up letter to e-mails or faxes, must be in writing and mailed to the following address:

Regular Mail

Bureau of Land Management
Director (210)
Attention: Brenda Hudgens-Williams
BLM Protest Coordinator
P.O. Box 71383
Washington, D.C. 20024-1383

Overnight Mail

Bureau of Land Management
Director (210)
Attention: Brenda Hudgens-Williams
BLM Protest Coordinator
20 M Street SE, Room 2134LM
Washington, D.C. 20003

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your protest, be advised that your entire protest, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your protest to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

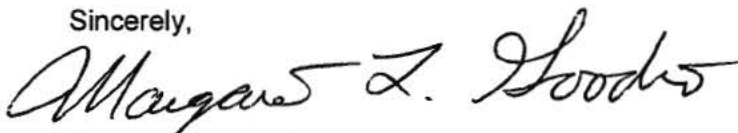
The BLM Director will make every attempt to promptly render a decision on each protest. The decision will be in writing and will be sent to the protesting party by certified mail, return receipt requested. The decision of the BLM Director shall be the final decision of the Department of the Interior. Responses to protest issues will be compiled and formalized in a Director's Protest Decision Report made available following the issuance of the decisions.

Upon resolution of all protests, the BLM will issue the Approved RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Record of Decision (ROD). The Approved RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and ROD will be mailed or made available electronically to all who participated in the planning process and will be available to all parties through the "Planning" page of the BLM National Web site (www.blm.gov/planning) or by mail upon request.

Unlike planning decisions, implementation decisions included in this Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment are not subject to protest under the BLM planning regulations, but are subject to administrative remedies and review, primarily through appeal to the U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Hearing and Appeals, Interior Board of Land Appeals pursuant to 43 CFR Part 4 Subpart E. Implementation decisions generally constitute the BLM's final approval allowing on-the-ground actions to proceed. Where implementation decisions are made as part of the land use planning process, they are still subject to the appeals process or other administrative review as prescribed by specific resource program regulations after the BLM resolves the protests to land use planning decisions and issues a plan amendment and ROD. The Approved RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and ROD will therefore identify the implementation decisions made in the plan that may be appealed to the Office of Hearing and Appeals.

We appreciate your interest and encourage your continued involvement in the planning process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Margaret L. Goodro". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Margaret" being more prominent and the last name "Goodro" following in a similar style.

Margaret L. Goodro
Field Manager

Protest Regulations

[CITE: 43CFR1610.5-2]

TITLE 43—PUBLIC LANDS: INTERIOR

CHAPTER II- BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

PART 1600—PLANNING, PROGRAMMING, BUDGETING—Table of Contents

Subpart 1610—Resource Management Planning

Sec. 1610.5-2 Protest Procedures

- (a) Any person who participated in the planning process and has an interest which is or may be adversely affected by the approval or amendment of a resource management plan may protest such approval or amendment. A protest may raise only those issues which were submitted for the record during the planning process.
 - (1) The protest shall be in writing and shall be filed with the Director. The protest shall be filed within 30 days of the date the Environmental Protection Agency published the notice of receipt of the final environmental impact statement containing the plan or amendment in the *Federal Register*. For an amendment not requiring the preparation of an environmental impact statement, the protest shall be filed within 30 days of the publication of the notice of its effective date.
 - (2) The protest shall contain:
 - (i) The name, mailing address, telephone number and interest of the person filing the protest;
 - (ii) A statement of the issue or issues being protested;
 - (iii) A statement of the part or parts of the plan or amendment being protested;
 - (iv) A copy of all documents addressing the issue or issues that were submitted during the planning process by the protesting party or an indication of the date the issue or issues were discussed for the record; and
 - (v) A concise statement explaining why the State Director's decision is believed to be wrong.
 - (3) The Director shall promptly render a decision on the protest. The decision shall be in writing and shall set forth the reasons for the decision. The decision shall be sent to the protesting party by certified mail, return receipt requested.
- (b) The decision of the Director shall be the final decision of the Department of the Interior.

Reader's Guide

How to Use this Document

This Proposed Recreation Area Management Plan/California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS) is presented in five chapters, consistent with federal requirements that guide the preparation of an EIS.

- **Chapter 1** sets the stage by describing the purpose and need for preparation of the Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS as well as providing key background information.
- **Chapter 2** describes several potential management approaches, or “alternatives.” This document describes eight alternative land use plans, including the no action alternative and a proposed plan and proposed plan amendment.
- **Chapter 3** describes the environment, or resources, that would be affected by the decisions contained in the individual alternatives.
- **Chapter 4** describes the impacts of the potential decisions on the resources described in Chapter 3.
- **Chapter 5** describes the actions undertaken to provide open and effective participation from members of the public, as well as from organizations, governmental agencies, and consultation with the tribes that all have a stake in the outcome of this process. This chapter also describes the comment analysis process and contains selected responses to public comments on the Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS.

The appendices and glossary provide more detailed information, which some readers may find helpful when reviewing the main text of the document.

In many cases, potential decisions or other discussions contained in this Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS refer directly to maps and tables. In fact, many potential decisions themselves are “map based.” The reader must rely on the text, maps, and tables taken together to fully understand the potential decisions described for each alternative.

The BLM planning team is willing to meet with groups, individuals, or members of the media to go over the key points in the Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS.

Requests for Additional Information

All inquiries should be sent to:

Greg Hill
RAMP Team Leader
BLM California Desert District
22835 San Juan de los Lagos
Moreno Valley, CA 92553
(951) 697-5395
Greg_Hill@blm.gov

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared this Proposed Recreation Area Management Plan/Amendment to the California Desert Conservation Area Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS) to provide direction for managing public lands administered by the BLM and to analyze the environmental effects resulting from implementing the alternatives addressed in this document.

The overall Planning Area for this document encompasses the Imperial Sand Dunes Special Recreation Management Area, which includes the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness as well as an approximately one-mile-wide planning zone around the entire Imperial Sand Dunes Special Recreation Management Area. The Planning Area encompasses 214,930 acres and is located in eastern Imperial County, California, within the BLM California Desert Conservation Area. This Recreation Area Management Plan and CDCA Plan Amendment has been developed for federal surface and mineral estate managed by the BLM within the Planning Area.

The Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS was prepared in compliance with BLM's planning regulations Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1600 under the authority of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. This document also meets the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality's Regulations for Implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508), and requirements of BLM's NEPA Handbook H-1790-1.

This document is also available on the Internet at www.blm.gov/en/fo/elcentro and on compact disc.

Purpose and Need

Currently, the BLM manages resources within the Planning Area under the CDCA Plan (1980) and CDCA Plan amendments, including the *Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan* (2002a), *Western Colorado Desert Routes of Travel* (2003a), and Imperial Sand Dunes RAMP (1987). The BLM released a revised Imperial Sand Dunes RAMP (2003b), which was challenged in court and was subsequently vacated by the Federal District Court. As part of the court's decision, interim closures to protect threatened and endangered species in the Imperial Sand Dunes, in place since 2001, remain pending completion of this RAMP.

This Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS combines the relevant portions of those documents and updates the plan with issues and concerns identified during the scoping process. The purpose is to provide direction that will guide future management actions for BLM-administered lands within the Planning Area. The Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS analyzes alternatives to resolve management issues, determines management objectives and actions, and establishes methods to facilitate multiple use and sustained yield management for the entire Planning Area.

Issues

The Notice of Intent to prepare the Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on March 18, 2008. The BLM held three public scoping meetings in April of 2008 and solicited comments. Resource specialists were present to answer questions, and attendees were encouraged to take extra information packages and comment forms, and distribute them to interested individuals that were not able to attend the meetings.

Comments were received from the public, agencies, organizations, and other interested stakeholders. Key issues identified included: designation of open and closed off-highway vehicle recreation areas; allowable uses within the Planning Area; resource protection, particularly of the microphyll woodlands, plant and wildlife species, and cultural resources; law enforcement and public health and safety; hazardous materials management; and facilities management.

The formal comment period for the Draft Recreation Area Management Plan/Draft EIS was from March 26, 2010 to August 9, 2010. BLM held three public comment meetings in April 2010 at which oral comments were recorded and written comments were accepted. Written comments were also accepted via letter, email, and fax throughout the comment period. Key issues identified during the public comment period were similar to those received during the public scoping period and included air quality and protection of Peirson's milk-vetch.

Alternatives

The basic goal of developing alternatives was to prepare different combinations of management actions to address issues and to resolve conflicts among uses. Alternatives must meet the purpose and need, be reasonable, and include those that are practical or feasible from the technical and economic standpoint and using common sense. Alternatives may also provide a mix of resource protection, use, and development; must be responsive to the issues; and meet the established planning

criteria. Each alternative is a complete land use plan that provides a framework for multiple-use management of the full spectrum of resources, resource uses, and programs present in the Planning Area.

Two types of land use planning decisions are found under each topic for each alternative: Desired Future Conditions (resource goals and objectives) and Management Actions (prescriptions to help achieve management objectives).

Under all alternatives, the BLM will manage the public lands in accordance with all applicable laws, regulations, and BLM policy and guidance, and to meet Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines. A summary of the key resource management proposals in this Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS are reflected by alternative at the end of this summary in Table ES-1.

Alternative 1 (No Action) describes the management conditions prescribed in the 1987 RAMP for the Planning Area. Alternative 1 provides an opportunity to compare the 1987 RAMP-prescribed management with various strategies suggested to be analyzed for future management. The CDCA Plan would not be amended under this alternative, because it already has been so amended by the 1987 RAMP. Multiple use classes and off-highway vehicle area designations would remain the same as in the 1987 RAMP. Alternative 1 represents the No Action alternative required by NEPA, and would reaffirm current management under the 1987 RAMP. Alternative A does not take into account the court-ordered administrative closures. Management of recreation opportunities, special status species habitat, and other resources would be maintained at existing levels prior to the 2000 closure order. This alternative would not modify allowable uses to address emerging issues on public lands. The No Action Alternative does not take into account the temporary closure based on the following rationale: A temporary closure is an administrative action (Imperial Sand Dunes Special Creation Management Area closures were under 8341) and not a formal land use decision approved according to 43 CFR 1610.

Alternative 2 describes the continuation of the present management of the Planning Area based on the 1987 RAMP. Alternative 2 provides an opportunity to compare the current management with various strategies suggested to be analyzed for future management. Alternative 2 includes compliance with policies and management measures instituted since the 1987 RAMP was implemented, including the designation of the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness in 1994. This alternative includes the interim Administrative Closures of OHV recreation areas. The court-mandated Administrative Closures would be maintained and adopted by BLM under this alternative. Multiple use classes and off-highway vehicle area designations would remain the same as currently designated.

Alternative 3 generally places emphasis on preservation of the Planning Area's natural, biological, and cultural resources through limited public use. It focuses on natural processes and other unobtrusive methods for natural resource use and management. It proposes fewer motorized and developed recreation opportunities than other alternatives. Alternative 3 would

result in a CDCA Plan Amendment that addresses Multiple Use Classes; establishes Visual Resource Management Classes; manages lands with wilderness characteristics; updates Areas of Critical Environmental Concern; establishes recreation area management zones; designates exclusion or avoidance areas for camping and land use authorizations; adjusts land tenure; designates all BLM-administered lands within the Planning Area as open, closed, or limited to motorized use; and replaces the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan and Western Colorado Desert Route of Travel Plan decisions in the Planning Area.

Alternative 4 provides visitors with opportunities to experience natural, biological, and cultural resource values of the Planning Area. It emphasizes a combination of natural processes and active management techniques for recreation and use management. The alternative includes management decisions that would provide a balance of multiple uses. Alternative 4 identifies a higher level of preservation and a lower level of motorized recreation, recreation opportunities, and renewable development than Alternatives 5 and 6. Alternative 4 does not provide for management of lands with wilderness characteristics, which differentiates it from Alternative 3. Alternative 4 would result in a CDCA Plan amendment that addresses Multiple Use Classes; establishes Visual Resource Management Classes; updates Areas of Critical Environmental Concern; establishes recreation area management zones; designates exclusion or avoidance areas for camping and land use authorizations; adjusts land tenure; designates all BLM-administered lands within the Planning Area as open, closed, or limited to motorized use; and replaces the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan and Western Colorado Desert Route of Travel Plan decisions in the Planning Area.

Alternative 5 provides visitors with opportunities to experience natural, biological, and cultural resource values of the Planning Area. It emphasizes a combination of natural processes and active management techniques for recreation and use management. The alternative includes management decisions that would provide a balance of multiple uses. Alternative 5 identifies a more moderate level of preservation than Alternative 4 and a more moderate level of motorized recreation, recreation opportunities, and renewable development than Alternative 6. Alternative 5 would result in a CDCA Plan amendment that addresses Multiple Use Classes; establishes Visual Resource Management Classes; updates Areas of Critical Environmental Concern; establishes recreation area management zones; designates exclusion or avoidance areas for camping and land use authorizations; adjusts land tenure; designates all BLM-administered lands within the Planning Area as open, closed, or limited to motorized use; and replaces the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan and Western Colorado Desert Route of Travel Plan decisions in the Planning Area. In contrast to Alternative 3, Alternative 5 would not provide for management of lands with wilderness characteristics.

Alternative 6 provides visitors with opportunities to experience natural, biological, and cultural resource values of the Planning Area. It emphasizes a combination of natural processes and active management techniques for recreation and use management. The alternative includes

management decisions that would provide a balance of multiple uses. Alternative 6 identifies a lower level of preservation than Alternative 4 and a higher level of motorized recreation, recreation opportunities, and renewable development than Alternative 5. Alternative 6 would result in a CDCA Plan amendment that addresses Multiple Use Classes; establishes Visual Resource Management Classes; updates Areas of Critical Environmental Concern; establishes recreation area management zones; designates exclusion or avoidance areas for camping and land use authorizations; adjusts land tenure; and designates all BLM-administered lands within the Planning Area as open, closed, or limited to motorized use; and replaces the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan and Western Colorado Desert Route of Travel Plan decisions in the Planning Area.

Alternative 7 generally places an emphasis on consumer-driven uses and the widest array of uses, such as renewable energy, transportation, and utility rights-of-way (ROWs), and enhanced recreational opportunities (including motorized recreation). It identifies areas most appropriate for these various uses. It places a greater emphasis on developed and motorized recreation opportunities and a lesser emphasis on remote settings and primitive recreation. Alternative 7 would result in a CDCA Plan amendment that addresses Multiple Use Classes; establishes Visual Resource Management Classes; updates Areas of Critical Environmental Concern; establishes recreation area management zones; designates exclusion or avoidance areas for camping and land use authorizations; adjusts land tenure; designates all BLM-administered lands within the Planning Area as open, closed, or limited to motorized use; and replaces the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan and Western Colorado Desert Route of Travel Plan decisions in the Planning Area.

Alternative 8 (Proposed Plan and CDCA Plan Amendment; preferred alternative) provides for management of each resource and resource use by establishing a balance between authorized resource use and the protection and long-term sustainability of sensitive resources. It allows visitation and development within the Planning Area, while ensuring that resource protection is not compromised in accordance with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield as mandated by FLPMA. The proposed decisions under this alternative are a combination of features from several of the other alternatives. Alternative 8 would result in a CDCA Plan amendment that addresses Multiple Use Classes; establishes Visual Resource Management Classes; updates Areas of Critical Environmental Concern; establishes recreation area management zones; designates exclusion or avoidance areas for camping and land use authorizations; adjusts land tenure; designates all BLM-administered lands within the Planning Area as open, closed, or limited to motorized use; and replaces the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan and Western Colorado Desert Route of Travel Plan decisions in the Planning Area.

Changes between the Draft and Proposed Plan

Comments on the Draft RAMP/Draft EIS received from the public and internal BLM review were considered and incorporated as appropriate into the proposed plan. Public comments resulted in a variety of clarifications and modifications throughout the Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS. Revisions made between the Draft RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Draft EIS and the Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS include the following: quantification of some management goals and objectives; additional analysis of impacts to air quality; clarification of multiple-use classes and visual resource management; consideration of lands with wilderness characteristics; modifications to alternatives regarding camping in the Dunefly Flats area; and modifications to initially described implementation-level decisions to correctly categorize them as plan-level decisions or implementation actions. The Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS also considers changes to Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, i.e., Plank Road, East Mesa, and North Algodones Dunes Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. The Preferred Alternative would retain the existing 416-acre Plank Road ACEC; reduce the East Mesa Area of Critical Environmental Concern from 6,454 acres to 5,799 acres; and eliminate the North Algodones Dunes Area of Critical Environmental Concern to remove redundant management prescriptions between this Area of Critical Environmental Concern and the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness.

Finally, the Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment has been adjusted to be consistent with the Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Solar Energy Development in Six Southwestern States (Solar PEIS). The preferred alternative changes some lands from available for solar energy development to excluded where those lands were bordered by exclusion areas in the Solar PEIS.

Government and Public Involvement

The BLM continued collaboration efforts by including communities in the formulation and development of alternatives. The scoping meetings gave the public an opportunity to provide input for the BLM to consider in refining the issues to be addressed, discuss visions for BLM lands, and begin exploring alternative ways to manage BLM lands and resources in the Planning Area. Input received from the public (both groups and individuals) was considered in developing the alternatives. The public comments and issues were considered in the range of alternatives and analyzed in the EIS, as required by NEPA.

The Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan Amendment and Final EIS was developed with coordination and cooperation from the following agencies: California Department of Fish and Game, California State Historic Preservation Office, and United States Fish and

Wildlife Service. The United States Border Patrol, El Centro Sector, and Imperial County Planning Department are participating as cooperating agencies. BLM also consulted with Indian tribes who have oral traditions or cultural concerns relating to the Planning Area, or who are documented as having occupied or used portions of the Planning Area during historic times.

**TABLE ES-1
SUMMARY OF KEY ALTERNATIVE COMPONENTS**

Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Alternative 6	Alternative 7	Alternative 8
Rangeland Health Standards Management							
Continue to utilize existing national fallback standards for rangeland health.	Adopt the regional standards for rangeland health: 1. Maintain soils that exhibit infiltration and permeability rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, geology, landform, and past uses. 2. Maintain wetland systems associated with subsurface and properly running and standing water function that have the ability to recover from major disturbances. Maintain also hydrologic conditions. 3. Promote healthy, productive, and diverse habitats for native species, maintaining special status species in places of natural occurrences. 4. Meet state and federal standards for water quality, including exemptions allowable by law.						
Air Resources Management							
Comply with the State of California for all proposed actions that would contribute to particulate matter emissions in the air as a result of actions taken.							
Evaluate impacts of activities within the Planning Area to air quality non-attainment. Implement BLM dust control plan to reduce the effects to air quality as required by the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District.							
Soil Resource Management							
Minimize surface disturbance from authorized activities.							
Incorporate erosion control measures into projects on a case-by-case basis.							
Manage vegetation to minimize erosion and maintain natural dune structure.							
Water Resources Management							
Continue to maintain or improve water quality in accordance with state and federal standards. Consult with the appropriate state agencies on proposed projects that may significantly affect water quality.							
Maintain authorized vehicle routes in a manner that will promote natural hydrology and protect water quality through application of best management practices.							
Vegetative Resource Management							
	Encourage enforcement of existing administrative vehicle closures.	Classify microphyll woodlands as exclusion areas ¹ for all commercial and non-commercial surface-disturbing activities.	Classify microphyll woodlands as avoidance areas ² for all commercial and non-commercial surface-disturbing activities.				Classify microphyll woodlands as avoidance areas ² for all commercial and non-commercial surface-disturbing activities.

**TABLE ES-1
SUMMARY OF KEY ALTERNATIVE COMPONENTS**

Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Alternative 6	Alternative 7	Alternative 8
Wildlife Resource Management							
Restore native species habitat distribution and occurrence (especially for priority species), conserve biological diversity, maintain genetic integrity and exchange, and improve availability of suitable habitats and habitat linkages. Initiate restoration activities in priority habitats, such as invasive weed removal or native seeding, to move toward desired habitat conditions and provide functional landscapes to sustain populations of fish and wildlife species. Wildlife habitat improvement projects for the Planning Area would be implemented in coordination with California Department of Fish and Game, pursuant to Section 103(f) of the California Desert Protection Act of 1994							
Special Status Species Management							
Open some areas of Peirson's Milk-vetch (PMV) critical habitat (existing and future designated) to motorized recreation and close other areas of critical habitat to motorized recreation.	Open some areas of PMV critical habitat (existing and future designated) to motorized recreation and close other areas of critical habitat to motorized recreation.	Close PMV critical habitat (existing and future designated) to motorized recreation.	Open some areas of critical habitat (existing and future designated) to some limited motorized recreation (seasonal closures, nighttime closures).	Close PMV critical habitat (existing and future designated) to motorized recreation.	Open some areas of PMV critical habitat (existing and future designated) to motorized recreation and close other areas of critical habitat to motorized recreation.	Open some areas of PMV critical habitat (existing and future designated) to motorized recreation and close other areas of critical habitat to motorized recreation.	Close PMV critical habitat (existing and future designated) to motorized recreation.
	Classify PMV critical habitat as an avoidance area ² for solar and wind energy development, as well as all other types of land use authorization.	Exclude PMV critical habitat from solar and wind energy development, as well as all other types of land use authorization.	Classify PMV critical habitat as an avoidance area ² for solar and wind energy development, as well as all other types of land use authorization.	Open PMV critical habitat to solar and wind energy development as well as all other types of land use authorization.	Exclude PMV critical habitat from solar and wind energy development as well as all other types of land use authorization.		Classify PMV critical habitat as an avoidance area ² for solar and wind energy development, as well as all other types of land use authorization.

**TABLE ES-1
SUMMARY OF KEY ALTERNATIVE COMPONENTS**

Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Alternative 6	Alternative 7	Alternative 8
Special Status Species Management (cont.)							
		Close camping within habitat for the Mojave population of desert tortoise and BLM sensitive species habitat.	Limit motorized recreation (within corridors or routes) within habitat for the Mojave population of desert tortoise and BLM sensitive species west of the Union Pacific Railroad tracks.				
Wildland Fire Management							
Use wildland fire suppression methods with lesser ground disturbance to minimize potential adverse impacts on special status species, critical habitat, desired plant communities, and cultural resources.							
Apply the minimum impact suppression tactics, identified in the Interagency Standards for Fire and Aviation Operations, in the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness, when wildland fire suppression is required.							
Cultural Resource Management							
Existing decisions of the RAMP would continue to be implemented.	Manage cultural resources in accordance with existing laws, regulations, Executive Orders, and State Historic Preservation Officer protocol agreements (as amended).						
Paleontological Resource Management							
Evaluate paleontological resources as they are discovered, considering their scientific, educational, and recreational values. Identify appropriate objectives, management actions, and allowable uses for fossil localities as they are found.							

**TABLE ES-1
SUMMARY OF KEY ALTERNATIVE COMPONENTS**

Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Alternative 6	Alternative 7	Alternative 8
Visual Resource Management							
Class I: n/a	Class I: 26,098 acres ³						
Class II: 145,771 acres	Class II: 104,739 acres	Class II: 173,794 acres	Class II: 104,739 acres			Class II: 16,031 acres	Class II: 104,739 acres
Class III: 29,580 acres	Class III: 69,055 acres	Class III: 15,039 acres	Class III: 69,055 acres			Class III: 88,708 acres	Class III: 69,055 acres
Class IV: 3,200 acres	Class IV: 15,039 acres	Class IV: 0 acre	Class IV: 15,039 acres			Class IV: 84,094 acres	Class IV: 15,039 acres
Special Designations							
North Algodones Dunes Wilderness: 26,098 acres							
Plank Road Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC): 416 acres							
East Mesa ACEC: 6,454 acres		East Mesa ACEC: 5,799 acres					
North Algodones Dunes ACEC: 25,756 acres		North Algodones Dunes ACEC: 0 acre					
	Classify ACECs as avoidance areas ² for solar and wind energy development.	Exclude ACEC(s) from solar and wind energy development.	Classify ACECs as avoidance areas ² for solar and wind energy development. Classify ACECs as avoidance areas ² for all land use authorizations other than for solar and wind development.			Open ACECs to solar and wind energy development.	Exclude ACEC(s) from solar and wind energy development.

**TABLE ES-1
SUMMARY OF KEY ALTERNATIVE COMPONENTS**

Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Alternative 6	Alternative 7	Alternative 8
Wilderness Characteristics							
Continue current management of the 42,083 acres identified as WCU 1.			Continue current management of the 42,083 acres identified as WCU 1.				
Allow motorized recreation per OHV use allocations.		Consider on a case-by-case basis the use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment, or other form of mechanical transport as needed for administrative use, homeland security, or other law enforcement and fire suppression or prevention actions.	Allow motorized recreation per OHV use allocations.				

**TABLE ES-1
SUMMARY OF KEY ALTERNATIVE COMPONENTS**

Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Alternative 6	Alternative 7	Alternative 8
Wilderness Characteristics (cont.)							
Protect wilderness characteristics that are present on the lands through prescriptions of the recreation management zones for each alternative.		Monitor conditions and uses in and around lands with wilderness characteristics. Identify actions or uses that impair wilderness characteristics and take actions to repair or minimize impairments (e.g., signage and restoration).	Protect wilderness characteristics that are present on the lands through prescriptions of the recreation management zones for each alternative.				
Mineral Resource Management							
Locatable							
Maintain ISD SRMA—excluding the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness, and ACEC(s)—as open to mineral entry under the Mining Law, subject to Section 7 and Section 106 consultations.		Propose withdrawal of the ISD SRMA, ACEC(s), and critical habitat from mineral entry.	Propose withdrawal of the ACEC(s) and critical habitat from mineral entry. Maintain the ISD SRMA—excluding the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness—as open to mineral entry under the Mining Law, subject to Section 7 and Section 106 consultations.			Maintain ISD SRMA—excluding the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness, and ACEC(s)—as open to mineral entry under the Mining Law, subject to Section 7 and Section 106 consultations.	

**TABLE ES-1
SUMMARY OF KEY ALTERNATIVE COMPONENTS**

Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Alternative 6	Alternative 7	Alternative 8
Leasable							
Open the entire Planning Area, with the exclusion of the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness, to geothermal minerals leasing and surface occupancy.		Prohibit geothermal minerals leasing within the entire Planning Area.	Open the entire Planning Area, with the exclusion of the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness, to geothermal minerals leasing, but with a no surface occupancy stipulation.	Allow geothermal mineral leasing on nominated lands under 43 CFR 3203.10.		Open the entire Planning Area, with the exclusion of the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness, to geothermal minerals leasing and surface occupancy.	Exclude ISD SRMA and donated lands from geothermal minerals leasing.
Available acres for geothermal leasing: 188,426		Available acres for geothermal leasing: 0		Available acres for geothermal leasing: 11,939		Available acres for geothermal leasing: 188,426	Available acres for geothermal leasing: 35,115
Saleable							
	Allow mineral sales or free use permits within the ISD SRMA.	Prohibit mineral sales or free use permits within the ISD SRMA.	Allow mineral sales or free use permits within the ISD SRMA.				Prohibit mineral sales or free use permits within the ISD SRMA.

**TABLE ES-1
SUMMARY OF KEY ALTERNATIVE COMPONENTS**

Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Alternative 6	Alternative 7	Alternative 8
Recreation Resource Management							
		Open Recreation Management Zone (RMZ) acres: 74,676	Open RMZ acres: 105,843	Open RMZ acres: 103,839	Open RMZ acres: 108,914	Open RMZ acres: 125,710	Open RMZ acres: 127,416
		Resource Protection RMZ acres: 61,680	Resource Protection RMZ acres: 29,122	Resource Protection RMZ acres: 32,516	Resource Protection RMZ acres: 27,441	Resource Protection RMZ acres: 10,645	Resource Protection RMZ acres: 9,046
		Limited RMZ acres: 52,477	Limited RMZ acres: 53,868	Limited RMZ acres: 52,477			Limited RMZ acres: 52,370
		North Algodones Dunes Wilderness RMZ acres: 26,098					
Transportation and Public Access							
Open Off-highway Vehicle (OHV) acres: 120,393	Open OHV acres: 87,713	Open OHV acres: 74,676	Open OHV acres: 105,843	Open OHV acres: 103,839	Open OHV acres: 108,914	Open OHV acres: 125,710	Open OHV acres: 127,416
Closed OHV acres: 26,098	Closed OHV acres: 75,322	Closed OHV acres: 87,778	Closed OHV acres: 55,220	Closed OHV acres: 58,614	Closed OHV acres: 53,539	Closed OHV acres: 36,743	Closed OHV acres: 35,144
Limited OHV acres: 68,440	Limited OHV acres: 51,896	Limited OHV acres: 52,477	Limited OHV acres: 53,868	Limited OHV acres: 52,477			Limited OHV acres: 52,370
Allow general vehicle travel only on routes designated for motorized vehicles. Emergency vehicles may utilize a drivable wash to access a site. Where no roads exist, vehicles could be authorized on a case-by-case basis to travel cross-country to avoid the need for road building. Where new roads must be built, roadbeds would be no wider than needed for reliable access; BLM specifications would also be used to reduce erosion.							

**TABLE ES-1
SUMMARY OF KEY ALTERNATIVE COMPONENTS**

Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Alternative 6	Alternative 7	Alternative 8
Lands and Realty Management							
Allow apiary permits on a case-by-case basis within strategically located sites to limit interaction with the public.		Prohibit apiary permits in the Planning Area.	Allow apiary permits on a case-by-case basis within strategically located sites to limit interaction with the public.				
	PMV critical habitat, flat-tailed horned lizard management area, donated lands, and ACECs would be avoidance areas ² for solar and wind energy development.	PMV critical habitat, flat-tailed horned lizard management area, donated lands, and ACEC(s) would be exclusion areas ¹ for solar and wind energy development.	PMV critical habitat, flat-tailed horned lizard management area, donated lands, and ACECs would be avoidance areas ² for solar and wind energy development.			PMV critical habitat, flat-tailed horned lizard management area, donated lands, and ACECs would be available for solar and wind energy development.	PMV critical habitat, flat-tailed horned lizard management area, donated lands, and ACEC(s) would be exclusion areas ¹ for solar energy development.
	PMV critical habitat would be an avoidance area ² for all other types of land use authorization.	PMV critical habitat would be an exclusion area ¹ for all other types of land use authorization.	PMV critical habitat would be an avoidance area ² for all other types of land use authorization.			PMV critical habitat would be available for all other types of land use authorization.	PMV critical habitat would be an exclusion area ¹ for all other types of land use authorization.

**TABLE ES-1
SUMMARY OF KEY ALTERNATIVE COMPONENTS**

Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Alternative 6	Alternative 7	Alternative 8
Lands and Realty Management (cont.)							
Entire Planning Area would be available for solar and wind energy development (with exception of North Algodones Dunes Wilderness).						Entire Planning Area would be available for solar energy development (with exception of North Algodones Dunes Wilderness).	
Acres available for solar and wind energy development: 188,833	Acres available for solar and wind energy development: 47,131	Acres available for solar and wind energy development: 39,694				Acres available for solar and wind energy development: 188,833	Acres available for solar and wind energy development: 35,115
Avoidance acres ² for solar and wind energy development: 0		Avoidance acres ² for solar and wind energy development: 144,290				Avoidance acres ² for solar and wind energy development: 0	
Acres excluded ¹ from solar and wind energy development: 0	Acres excluded ¹ from solar and wind energy development: 141,702	Acres excluded ¹ from solar and wind energy development: 4,847				Acres excluded ¹ from solar and wind energy development: 0	Acres excluded ¹ from solar and wind energy development: 153,717
Public Health and Safety							
Maintain area adjacent to the U.S.–Mexico border as open to public use and continue voluntary compliance through public education and cooperation with U.S. Border Patrol to enhance public safety.	Close area within 100 feet of the U.S.–Mexico border to public use.	Close Roosevelt Reservation area (60 feet) adjacent to the U.S.–Mexico border to public use.				Maintain area adjacent to the U.S.-Mexico border as open to public use and continue voluntary compliance through public education and cooperation with U.S. Border Patrol to enhance public safety.	

See notes on next page.

¹Exclusion area is defined as an area which is not available for location of rights-of-way under any conditions.

²Avoidance area is defined as an area to be avoided but which may be available for location of right-of-way with special stipulations.

³The acreages identified for VRM Class I represent the digital boundaries of the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness. These acreages may not coincide completely with those designated by Congress.